

# Castlemaine Naturalist

February 2016

Vol. 41.1 #439

Monthly newsletter of the  
Castlemaine Field Naturalists Club Inc.



Paradise Shelduck  
- see article by Nigel Harland, p2

## Rita, George and Ern

Early next year the Club will have been in existence for forty years. At the December General Meeting the Committee decided to honour the achievements of three of the founding members of the Club, Rita Mills, George Broadway and Ern Perkins. They were presented with a memento of the occasion together with Life Membership.

Looking over the records of the past 40 years, they show that Rita, George and Ern have held office bearing positions 47 times and no doubt many more times being committee members. There must be many club members who have benefited from their expertise made available in the newsletter, at general meetings and on excursions. Such expertise would have been accurate in technical terms and delivered in a friendly way.

The current committee hopes that it is able to continue the high standards created by Rita, George and Ern into the future. Maybe not quite as high, but somewhere close to it.



# Of Twitches and Dips

Nigel Harland

I am sure that most of you know this terminology of birdwatching, but just in case you don't, a twitch is a trip (normally long distance) to find a rare bird that has been sighted by someone else. A dip is when you go on a twitch, but fail to find the bird in question. I have been on many twitches and fortunately my twitches have been successful.

In early January a duck was spotted on a lake near Nowra on the eastern coast of New South Wales. It was identified as a Paradise Shelduck; a resident of New Zealand which had never been seen on mainland Australia. Anne and I had planned to go to Portland to search for another rarity – the Cape Gannet (a vagrant from South Africa). Plans were quickly changed and we booked flights to Sydney and a hire car to get us the two hours or so to Nowra. Prior to booking, we checked to see if the bird had been sighted that day, it had and the next day the twitch started. Everything went to plan and we arrived at a friend's house around lunchtime. Quick lunch and then the half hour drive to the lake. It was cold and there was a strong wind. Undaunted we set off on the 3km walk to where it always was. It wasn't. We waited, walked a bit further, came back and still it wasn't there. Drove back to our friend's house and decided to have another look the next day. You guessed it, no duck. Drove back to the airport and flew home, fully expecting to hear that it was back the next day. It wasn't and it has still not been seen again. That is what you would call a serious dip.

Anne and I checked on the Cape Gannet at Portland and it had been seen (with a fledgling) the weekend we got back. So we booked accommodation and headed off on the four hour drive to Portland. We arrived around 2pm and headed for the Gannet rookery. We came to a gate which was closed, but had a sign pointing to the rookery. It also had a sign saying Rifle Range in action, keep out. There were no parked cars and no rifle shots could be heard. So, we walked along the track and saw the likely buildings of the rifle range together with access to the rookery. Again there was no one there so we headed down to the rookery. You could get fairly close before there was a protective fence.

The difference between an Australian Gannet and a Cape Gannet is that both have gular stripes (a black stripe down the throat), but the Cape Gannet's is much longer. There were perhaps 500 Gannets there, so trying to find one with a long gular stripe was not going to be easy. A bit like Where's Wally really. Particularly so when the birds were preening and not showing much of their throat at all. So I put up the scope and started moving from one bird to another. An hour went by with no luck at all, but then I spotted a bird in the location we had been recommended to search which I decided to look at very carefully. It had a fledgling, so that was a positive; I just had to keep looking until I saw the stripe. At one angle, there was a definite marking, but when it turned towards me and looked upwards, there was the diagnostic feature in full view. I left the scope focused and called Anne over and of course it took her a long time to see the stripe. The next problem was to keep the bird in view and swap the scope for the camera so I could get some photos. Mission accomplished!

The next challenge was to get back to the car! On our walk back we did hear some rifle shots, so most of the journey was spent on all fours, crawling back to the



car. Seeing a Cape Gannet is pretty good, but I didn't want it to be my last achievement! So, a successful Twitch. One out of two ain't bad.

The photo of the Shelduck [front cover] is obviously not mine, it was willingly provided by Bernie O'Keefe, who managed to get there a couple of days before I did. He also saw the Cape Gannet the week before Anne and I went.



Spot the Cape Gannet -





# Walking in Werribee Gorge

Joy Weatherill

Werribee Gorge State Park consists of over 200 hectares of land - proclaimed a State park in 1975 to preserve native flora and fauna, eg Grey Box, Manna Gum, Golden Wattle, Peregrine Falcons, Eagles, Platypus, Echidna, Koalas, Swamp wallabies and Eastern Grey kangaroos.



The circuit I walked, offers spectacular views, and interesting features like the stand of White Cypress pine, usually found north of the Dividing Range. Among other plants are Wedge-leaf Hop-bush, and Snowy Mint-bush and several species of ferns.

About 500 million years ago, fine layers of eroded material deposited by marine currents built up in the sea.

The Gorge has been carved out of the ancient sea floor by the Werribee River over millions of years.



Another amazing feature are the synclines and anticlines in the cliffs adjacent to our walking path. Anticlines - upward folds, and synclines - downward folds, are exposed along the cliff face in the Ordovician sandstones and slates. These were formed during the Devonian Period about 380 million years ago when the inward pressure from tectonic plate movement caused the sediments to buckle.

Other events that have occurred include the advance and retreat of an ice sheet and the inflow of volcanic lava, so that at several points along the walk there are very clear glacial scrapings to be seen on the cliff face.





## Future SEANA camps

Each year SEANA (South East Australian Naturalists' Association) have an autumn and a spring camp where field naturalist members from all over the region come together in a designated area to explore the surrounds under the guidance of local experts. Accommodation or camping facilities and meals are provided at very reasonable prices. These camps are a wonderful opportunity to meet with other members to learn about the natural environment.

**Autumn 2016** April 8-11: Geelong Club hosting camp on Bellarine Peninsula. More information as it becomes available.

**Spring 2016** No SEANA camp due to ANN Get-together (Australian Naturalists Network) hosted by WA Naturalist Club in Perth Oct 2-10.

Contact: ANN 2016 Committee, Secretary, Margaret Lake:  
[mlake@iinet.net.au](mailto:mlake@iinet.net.au) or [ANN16@wanaturalists.org.au](mailto:ANN16@wanaturalists.org.au)

**Autumn 2017** Host Club: La Trobe and Sale FNC

**Spring 2017** Ringwood FNC

- Geraldine Harris

## **Committee members wanted**

At the February General Meeting we will include the AGM which doesn't take very long at all. Positions on the Committee are declared vacant and all are subject to re-election.

Committee Meetings are held on the third Thursday of each month, excluding December starting at 6pm and lasting an hour at most. There is no obligation to attend, but a quorum of 5 is desirable. It is a good way to get to know a little of how the club works and new opinions are always very welcome. You should have received a nomination form in the December newsletter, just fill it in and send it to George.

Nigel Harland

## **From the business meeting 19.1.2016**

Recommendation to leave fees unaltered for 2016 despite cost increases.

Max retiring from committee due to work commitments – will be sadly missed – are there any computer literate people out there willing to fill his shoes?

New committee members wanted. If we all did a job for two years every so often it would share the load, build an experienced pool of members and help us all to appreciate the tasks involved.

Speaker and excursion ideas would be gratefully received for the 2016 programme.

**Roadside cleanup dates for 2016:** February 20; May 7; August 20; Nov 19 at 9am - contact Geoff or Geraldine Harris

## **New club pamphlet - Rushes of the Castlemaine District**

Geraldine Harris

Until now my knowledge of these plants has been pretty well limited to a little rhyme – “sedges have edges but rushes are round” but now I know about culms and cataphylls, and that there are a variety of rushes with flat leaves, with leaves from the base and along the stems, with hollow onion-like leaves, and with leaves similar to culms or reduced to cataphylls. Rushes of the Castlemaine District includes information to help you key out 23 different rushes that are found in the Castlemaine area and is the latest pamphlet produced for our group by Ern Perkins. It is just the thing to take with you next time you are on a field outing where there might be some rushes. This new publication is available at meetings (also in the Market Building and in the Castlemaine Library) for 40c.

## **Observations**

(December 2015 meeting) -

- ◆ **Painted Honeyeater** seen recently at the Railway dam
- ◆ Nine Little Black Cormorants and one Little Pied Cormorant seen regularly at Expedition Pass Reservoir in recent days. The Darters have disappeared. There were two Darters for a short period, then down to one, and none have been seen at all for last week. Musk



Duck ducklings are still present, but spreading around the lake – independently feeding - Denis Hurley

- ◆ Rita Mills has had a single Grey Currawong at their place in Castlemaine North for a few years, but then it hadn't been recorded for a couple of months. A group of four was then seen in the backyard yesterday (10 Dec), moving around a bit like babblers. The group of four comprised two adults and two young Grey Currawongs. The young were awkward fliers. The parents seemed to be teaching the young ones how to get insects from under the bark.
- ◆ **Brush-tailed Phascogales** have had up to 5 offspring at Denis Hurley's place on Merrifield St.
- ◆ Jan Hall noted that Hyacinth Orchids have been out in the past week in McKenzies Hill area, which is somewhat surprising given the hot dry conditions. Denis Hurley has also seen them around near his place. They seem to be stunted in height this year.
- ◆ Geraldine Harris – During the annual bird count on the previous weekend (5 December), 9 Australian Pipits were seen around the Muckleford Railway station. Four were sheltering from the heat under an old sleeper – others were hopping around the sleepers.
- ◆ Geraldine Harris – In their house in Barkers Creek this morning, they woke to find that the ends of all their four bananas in the fruit bowl had been eaten. It was the long-eared bats, and they have been known in past at their place to nibble into peaches and nectarines within the fruit bowl.

Further reports by Chris Timewell -

- 15 December 2015 - 7.10 to 7.40am. A single **Eastern Koel** heard and seen calling near the intersection of Saint St and Wheeler St. After 10 minutes, it flew towards Norwood Hill area. Seen by myself and Damian Kelly calling and perching from trees in backyards around this area. Heard again in Norwood Hill area that evening at about 8.20pm. Not heard or seen next morning when searches conducted in same area, and not since.
- 13 January 2016, about 7.20pm - At least 20 **Fork-tailed Swifts** circling overhead near central Castlemaine (Saint St) in front of a cool change. Heading in a north-westerly direction.
- 17 January 2016, 9.50am. - Two **Blue-faced Honeyeaters** foraging in River Red Gums on road running alongside the Castlemaine Botanic Gardens.

And from Geraldine in Barkers Creek -

- 18 January: White-browed Babblers enjoying dust bath in back yard.
- 24 January: Dusky Woodswallows soaring on high with Welcome Swallows lower near house. Fine stick insect on fly screen.
- 26 January: A Rainbow Bee Eater sighted on way to creek and a Sacred Kingfisher in the Casuarina torulosa in front of the house.

**Disclaimer:** The opinions expressed in this newsletter are those of the contributors and not necessarily those of the club

# Castlemaine Field Naturalists

## Coming events

**Fri February 12, 2016:** Annual General Meeting  
speaker: Julian Hollis on Permian glacials

**Sat February 13 field trip:** to upper Coliban Res., leader Julian Hollis

**Sat February 20: roadside clean-up** meet 9 am at the corner of Golf Links road on Pyrenees highway

Takes 1 - 2 hours; Wear sturdy footwear and gloves. Garbage bags and reflective vests will be supplied. Please note KABC rules prohibit anyone under 16 from working on the roadside.

**Fri March 11 meeting:** speaker to be confirmed

### VISITORS ARE WELCOME AT CLUB ACTIVITIES

**General meetings** - (second Friday of each month, except January) are held in the Uniting Church (UCA) Hall (enter from Lyttleton St.) at 7.30 pm.

**Field Trips** - (Saturday following the general meeting) leave from the car park opposite Castle Motel, Duke Street at 1.30pm sharp unless stated otherwise. BYO morning and/or afternoon tea. Outdoor excursions are likely to be cancelled in extreme weather conditions. There are NO excursions on total fire ban days.

**Business meetings** - third Thursday of each month, except December, at George Broadways; 24a Greenhill Ave., at 6.00 pm. Members are invited to attend.

**Club website** - <http://castlemainefnc.wordpress.com/>

### Subscriptions for 2015

Ordinary membership: Single \$30, Family \$40

Pensioner or student: Single \$25, Family \$30

Subscription includes postage of the monthly newsletter, Castlemaine Naturalist

### 2015 Committee

President:	Nigel Harland		5474 8246
Secretary:	George Broadway	georgebroadway@bigpond.com	5472 2513
Treasurer:	Geoff Harris		
Geraldine Harris	5474 2244	Richard Piesse	0448 572 867
Max Schlachter	5472 1594	Noel Young (Editor)	5472 1345

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